

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2021

The Honorable Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig:

I write to express a range of concerns I have heard from my constituents over the past year regarding processing delays at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and substandard customer service.

First, I acknowledge that the IRS has suffered from decades of underinvestment – that its budget has been decimated and its personnel ranks depleted through no fault of its own. I fully support President Biden’s proposal to increase funding for the IRS to help reverse this decline. The pandemic has also added further strain to the agency as it has been tasked with implementing new and complex programs to bring urgent relief to the American people, all while performing its routine responsibilities of tax administration. The hardworking public servants at the IRS, with whom my office works every day, are in many cases doing the best they can with the limited resources they have.

At the same time, the ongoing delays associated with processing returns, as well as various customer service shortcomings, are unacceptable and require a redoubled focus from the agency’s leadership. Congress has appropriated billions of dollars in emergency funding for the IRS since the start of the pandemic and I urge the agency to do everything in its power to expedite the processing of outstanding returns, including the backlog of paper returns; better communicate with taxpayers about the status of those returns; and speed the hiring of new Customer Service Representatives to assist taxpayers with their questions.

I have heard from scores of frustrated constituents who report that their 2019 and 2020 returns remain unprocessed, despite filing them months ago, or, in some cases, more than a year ago. As you have testified, delayed processing of returns can prevent some taxpayers from claiming the Refundable Refund Credit, which was designed to be available to people who didn’t initially qualify for an Economic Impact Payment (EIP) or didn’t receive the full amount.¹ Others are simply still waiting for their tax refund to

¹ Written Testimony of Charles P. Rettig, Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service, Before the Senate Finance Committee on the Filing Season and COVID-19 Recovery, April 13, 2021.
<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/written-testimony-of-charles-p-rettig-commissioner-internal-revenue-service-before-the-senate-finance-committee-on-the-filing-season-and-covid-19-recovery>

arrive. Adding further anxiety for my constituents is their calls to the IRS often go unanswered. According to the National Taxpayer Advocate, during the current filing season, “IRS employees have answered about two percent of the roughly 70 million taxpayer calls to the IRS’s 1040 telephone line...[i]n other words, only about one out of every 50 calls has gotten through to a telephone assistor, and the taxpayers who managed to get through have waited on hold an average of 20 minutes.”² The agency can and must do better than this.

The IRS has in many instances performed admirably over the course of the past year – delivering hundreds of millions of EIPs, working quickly to implement the new Child Tax Credit program, and establishing a system to automatically provide refunds to taxpayers who experienced unemployment in 2020 and who filed their returns prior to new rules related to exemptions for their benefits. But it is critical that the agency devote further resources and attention to some of its most basic responsibilities to the American taxpayer: processing their returns quickly and answering their questions fully.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Malinowski". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

² National Taxpayer Advocate Blog: 2021 Filing Season Bumps in the Road: Part I, April 22, 2021.
<https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/news/nta-blog-2021-filing-season-bumps-in-the-road-part-1/>